



4191-02U

SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

20 CFR Parts 404 and 416

[Docket No. SSA-2013-0061]

RIN 0960-AH64

Returning Evidence at the Appeals Council Level

AGENCY: Social Security Administration.

ACTION: Final rule.

SUMMARY: This final rule adopts the notice of proposed rulemaking (NPRM) that we published in the Federal Register on October 21, 2015. This final rule revises our rules regarding returning evidence at the Appeals Council (AC) level. Under this final rule, the AC will no longer return additional evidence it receives when the AC determines the additional evidence does not relate to the period on or before the date of the administrative law judge (ALJ) decision.

DATES: Effective Date: This final rule is effective [insert date of publication in the FEDERAL REGISTER].

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Maren Weight, Office of Appellate Operations, Social Security Administration, 5107 Leesburg Pike, Falls Church, VA 22041, (703) 605-7100. For information on eligibility or filing for benefits, call our

national toll-free number, 1-800-772-1213 or TTY 1-800-325-0778, or visit our Internet site, Social Security Online, at <http://www.socialsecurity.gov>.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: This final rule adopts the NPRM that we published in the Federal Register on October 21, 2015.¹

Background

In the NPRM, we provided a 30-day comment period, which ended on November 20, 2015. We received no comments. We explained our reasons for proposing the rule which we are now adopting as a final rule in the preamble to the NPRM (80 FR at 63718-63719), and we incorporate that discussion here.

Regulatory Procedures

Good Cause for Effective Date

We find good cause for dispensing with the 30-day delay in the effective date of this final rule. 5 U.S.C. 553(d)(3). For the reasons discussed in the preamble to the NPRM, we are making a minor change to our current rules by discontinuing the practice of having the AC return additional evidence that it receives when the AC determines the additional evidence does not relate to the period on or before the date of the ALJ's decision. We now use many electronic services that make the practice of returning evidence unnecessary. For example, we now scan most of the medical evidence into the

¹ <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2015-10-21/pdf/2015-26747.pdf>

electronic claim(s) file or appointed representatives submit it through our Electronic Records Express system. This technology immediately uploads records into a claimant's electronic folder, making the records available for review in real time. As a result, it is neither administratively efficient nor cost effective for us to print out documents that have been submitted to us electronically by a claimant or appointed representative in order to return them to the claimant.

The change we are making in this final rule will allow us to better utilize our limited administrative resources. For these reasons, we find that it is unnecessary and contrary to the public interest to delay the effective date of our final rule.

Executive Order 12866 as supplemented by Executive Order 13563

We consulted with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and determined that this final rule does not meet the criteria for a significant regulatory action under Executive Order 12866 as supplemented by Executive Order 13563. Thus, OMB did not review the final rule.

Regulatory Flexibility Act

We certify that this final rule will not have a significant economic impact on a substantial number of small entities because it applies to individuals only. Thus, a

regulatory flexibility analysis is not required under the Regulatory Flexibility Act, as amended.

Paperwork Reduction Act

These Final Rules do not create any new or affect any existing collections and, therefore, do not require Office of Management and Budget approval under the Paperwork Reduction Act.

(Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Program Nos. 96.001, Social Security – Disability Insurance; 96.002, Social Security – Retirement Insurance; 96.004, Social Security – Survivors Insurance; and 96.006, Supplemental Security Income)

List of Subjects

20 CFR Part 404

Administrative practice and procedure; Blind; Disability benefits; Old-Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance; Reporting and recordkeeping requirements; Social Security.

20 CFR Part 416

Administrative practice and procedure; Aged, Blind, Disability benefits, Public Assistance programs; Reporting and recordkeeping requirements; Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

Carolyn W. Colvin,
Acting Commissioner of Social Security.

For the reasons set forth in the preamble, we amend 20 CFR chapter III, part 404 and part 416, as set forth below:

PART 404—FEDERAL OLD-AGE, SURVIVORS AND DISABILITY INSURANCE
(1950-)

Subpart J—Determinations, Administrative Review Process, and Reopening of
Determinations and Decisions

1. The authority citation for subpart J of part 404 continues to read as follows:

Authority: Secs. 201(j), 204(f), 205(a)–(b), (d)–(h), and (j), 221, 223(i), 225, and 702(a)(5) of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 401(j), 404(f), 405(a)–(b), (d)–(h), and (j), 421, 423(i), 425, and 902(a)(5)); sec. 5, Pub. L. 97–455, 96 Stat. 2500 (42 U.S.C. 405 note); secs. 5, 6(c)–(e), and 15, Pub. L. 98–460, 98 Stat. 1802 (42 U.S.C. 421 note); sec. 202, Pub. L. 108–203, 118 Stat. 509 (42 U.S.C. 902 note).

2. In § 404.976, revise paragraph (b)(1) to read as follows:

§ 404.976 Procedures before Appeals Council on review.

* * * * *

(b) * * * (1) The Appeals Council will consider all the evidence in the administrative law judge hearing record as well as any new and material evidence

submitted to it that relates to the period on or before the date of the administrative law judge hearing decision. If you submit evidence that does not relate to the period on or before the date of the administrative law judge hearing decision, the Appeals Council will explain why it did not accept the additional evidence and will advise you of your right to file a new application. The notice will also advise you that if you file a new application within 6 months after the date of the Appeals Council's notice, your request for review will constitute a written statement indicating an intent to claim benefits in accordance with § 404.630. If you file a new application within 6 months of the date of this notice, we will use the date of the request for review as the filing date for your application.

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PART 416 – SUPPLEMENTAL SECURITY INCOME FOR THE AGED, BLIND, AND DISABLED

Subpart N—Determinations, Administrative Review Process, and Reopening of Determinations and Decisions

3. The authority citation for subpart N of part 416 continues to read as follows:

Authority: Secs. 702(a)(5), 1631, and 1633 of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 902(a)(5), 1383, and 1383b); sec. 202, Pub. L. 108-203, 118 Stat. 509 (42 U.S.C. 902 note).

4. In § 416.1476, revise paragraph (b)(1) to read as follows:

§ 416.1476 Procedures before Appeals Council on review.

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(b) * * * (1) In reviewing decisions based on an application for benefits, the Appeals Council will consider the evidence in the administrative law judge hearing record as well as any new and material evidence submitted to it that relates to the period on or before the date of the administrative law judge hearing decision. If you submit evidence that does not relate to the period on or before the date of the administrative law judge hearing decision, the Appeals Council will explain why it did not accept the additional evidence and will advise you of your right to file a new application. The notice will also advise you that if you file a new application within 60 days after the date of the Appeals Council's notice, your request for review will constitute a written statement indicating an intent to claim benefits in accordance with § 416.340. If you file a new application within 60 days of the date of this notice, we will use the date of the request for review as the filing date for your application.

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